

Public Testimony on SB 322:  
AAC the qualifications of Department of Children and Families Employees

Select Committee on Children  
Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Good afternoon, thank you chairs, Senator Musto and Representative Urban and the other members of the Select Committee on Children for your time today. My name is Kelsey Nepote and I am a Master's of Social Work student at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work, concentrating in Policy Practice. I am a native of Kansas and came to Connecticut to pursue my MSW. I stand before you today seeking your support and ultimately your vote in favor of Senate Bill 322.

I received my BSW at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas and completed my practicum placement at the Kansas Chapter, NASW. It has been through the course of my undergraduate education in combination with my current instruction that I have formed a deep understanding of the knowledge and practice expertise social workers gain through our education.

In Kansas we have title protection, you simply cannot call yourself a social worker without having a social work degree from an accredited program and obtaining licensure at one of three levels. An additional forty-two states have title protection in some capacity; however, Connecticut is not among this group. While I know this is not a title protection issue, I feel it is important to demonstrate that Connecticut is lagging behind in obtaining proper and responsible labeling of social workers. I feel very strongly from my experience in Kansas that it is imperative to have DCF employees, in social work positions, obtain the education that supports that title for two reasons, consumer protection and improved quality of care.

Individuals who are referred for services at DCF are among the most vulnerable individuals living in the most disadvantaged situations in this state. They have the right to know if the person assigned to their case has the education and training to back the title. Consumers are taking a significant risk, many of which do not have the choice, in putting the details of their livelihood in someone else's hands. At the point in which DCF is called to provide care and intervene, families are most susceptible to the individuals surrounding them; that includes DCF workers. I strongly believe it is misleading to both consumers and the public not to have individuals trained in the title they are portraying themselves as. Would you see a doctor without them going to medical school? How about hire an attorney who did not pass the bar?

Improving the quality of care would benefit all involved in the DCF system. Employees providing care that do not have the rigorous training provided by a social work education, results in families are not receiving the highest level of care at their most trying times. If DCF only hired officially trained social workers I am confident the quality of care would increase. I do not yet understand the complexities of DCF but I do know that it has been in crisis for many years. In SB 322 there is a solution. By upgrading the standards to only hiring BSW and MSW, outcomes would be more efficient and effective.

Lastly I would like to address the language of the bill. SB 322 should include allowing the hiring of BSWs. To acquire my Bachelor's of Social Work I had to go through an application process, get accepted, abide by the NASW Code of Ethics, take 51 hours of social work courses, and obtain 480 hours of supervised practicum work. A combination of all of these requirements qualifies a BSW to engage in practice. BSW should be included has persons to hire.

I urge you to vote yes on SB 322 for reasons of improved consumer protection and quality of care. In addition, I urge you to make amend the language to include the hiring of BSWs.

Thank you for your time.